

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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BLISS

5th March, 1947

AMONG the many thousands of young men returned from the forces to the universities and colleges of this country are many hundreds who have entered or are expecting to enter theological colleges to prepare for the work of the Christian ministry. Many theological colleges have been closed for the greater part of the war and the Churches are now choosing and training the men who will in fifteen or twenty years' time bear the main burden of leadership in the Churches.

THE CALL TO THE MINISTRY

The question who are to be the ordained spiritual leaders of the Churches is of such vital importance both to the Churches and to society that a new development in this field deserves careful study and understanding.

Before describing in some detail the methods now adopted by the Church of England in their clergy selection centres, it is necessary to say a little about the underlying principles. Two main elements enter into the decision whether a man should or should not enter the ministry. One is the man's inner sense of call from God, and the other is the testing and ratification of that call by the Church. The Churches in

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By
IAN CROMBIE

England differ in their methods of bringing men into the ministry, partly because different customs and usages have grown up, and partly because their practice reflects the doctrines of Church and ministry which they hold. In the doctrine of the Church of England "the admission of a person to the sacred ministry is clearly a responsibility of the whole Church, exercised through its representative officers. . . . This responsibility has been shared by the bishops, clergy and laity".¹ In the Ordination Service the bishop turns first to the archdeacon with the words, "Take heed that the persons, whom ye present unto us, be apt and meet, for their learning and godly conversation, to exercise their ministry duly", and then to the people, charging them to declare any reason why the persons presented may not be ordained. Thus the clergy and the laity bear some share even in the Ordination Service. The new methods which have grown up during the war are a practical expression of this central doctrinal position, though it is doubtful whether large changes would have been made but for the situation created by the war.

CLERGY SELECTION CENTRES

The work of the chaplains during the war in "Padres' Hours", Confirmation classes and in the special courses which it was possible to hold, brought before many men the call to Christian service, and a very considerable number offered themselves for training for the ministry. It was clear that the vocation of all these men would have to be tested, and their suitability examined, before they could be taken into the limited accommodation of the theological colleges. The Central Advisory Council of Training for the Ministry,² set up before the last war, was the most suitable agency

¹ *The Training for the Ministry*, final report of the Archbishops' Commission, 1944. Appendix A, p. 78.

² Chairman, the Bishop of Gloucester. Secretary, the Rev. Kenneth Carey, Church House, Westminster, S.W. 1.

through which the Church might act. Before demobilization began to take place the Council organized selection centres in different places in England and overseas, where the matter of a man's suitability for the ministry could be thoroughly examined. The first was held in October, 1944. In July, 1945, the Bishops of the Provinces of Canterbury and York decided that for an interim period no man under forty should be accepted for admission to a recognized course of theological studies who had not been recommended at a selection centre. Later in the year the principals of all the Anglican theological colleges gave the scheme their unanimous approval.

These centres borrow something from the leadership selection schools of the army, as far as their outward form goes. That is to say, candidates spend three days in a given centre with the selectors, but there the similarity stops. It is not the job of a selection centre to devise tests, interviews and examinations which will enable the selectors to discover which among the many men conform to an already held standard of the desirable ordinand. The aim is rather to provide the conditions in which a man can test what he feels to be a vocation by being enabled to see more clearly what it involves, and submit his inner call to testing by the accredited representatives of the Church.

For two years selection centres were held almost every week in order to deal with the very large numbers. Now they are held about twice every month. Each centre lasts three days, and is attended by twenty or thirty men. The selectors for each particular centre are chosen by the Central Advisory Council from a panel of clergy and laymen, nominated by the various diocesan bishops. In part each centre approximates, for those who attend it, to a retreat with prayer, worship and led meditation on some aspect of the spiritual life. In part it is a course of instruction with

lectures on the Church of England and the meaning of the ministry. In these lectures is included one on the vocation of the laity, and something is done to stress the important consideration that a man who is not passed by the Board is still called by God to serve the Church.

During the three days each selector talks privately to every man present, and the selectors decide between themselves what ground they will cover; one talking to candidates about the life of prayer; another about the bread and butter matters of previous education and experience, financial and family circumstances; another about the signs of a vocation to the ministry which a man has already shown, in lay leadership in the Church or the forces, and in personal relations with his fellows. In one sense a series of interviews is more strenuous for the candidate than a single interview, but there is more chance that a man will overcome any initial reserve. He may feel that he has failed to express himself as he would have liked to one interviewer, but he may succeed with another.

The men who come to these selection centres are remarkably mixed. They come from all types of churchmanship. A few come from the Anglican communion overseas. Some are balanced and mature in their outlook on life, others are inexperienced and naive. A certain academic standard is insisted upon, namely that every man under forty must have matriculated. It is a matter of experience that a man who is not able to reach this standard usually fails to profit from a theological course. The atmosphere of a centre with its common life and common worship, and the deep impression that selectors and candidates alike are concerned only to find the will of God does much to mitigate the sensation of being on trial, which no method of selection entirely escapes.

At the end of the course, when the candidates have gone, the selectors meet to make their decision. This work is

exacting and highly responsible. First the candidates on whose suitability all agree are dealt with. They will be a minority, usually not more than ten per cent. The case of every other candidate is then carefully examined. All the facts collected by each selector are reported and each gives his opinion. When this has been done the dossier of testimonials and reports from sponsors and outside friends are opened and read. Those who are rejected are given some indication as to where their unsuitability lies, and if they wish for it they can have some help in choosing an alternative form of service. Every man has the right of appeal to a committee of the Council, meeting in London, who may invite him to attend a second selection course with different selectors. Some men, especially those who are very young, are told by the selectors to present themselves again in a year or so.

One remarkable feature of a selection centre is its freedom from bias to any one form of churchmanship. Among the selectors, those who are Evangelicals and those who are Anglo-Catholics are not looking for a good exponent of their own churchmanship. They hold in common with each other a conception of the ministry which transcends these issues, and they are looking for the man who in one of a dozen different ways will make a pastor, a priest or a prophet within the broad context of the Church of England.

There is always room for doubts about any method, however good, of performing a task on which so much depends. The theological colleges, in common with most other colleges, are filled with men who, after their experience of war, are alive, eager, and full of promise. They are going out into a parish system which will scarcely support many of them financially, and which will tax their faith to the uttermost. Although the gloomy side is not spared at the selection centre, and the rigours of the job are frankly faced (or as frankly as may be in so brief a time), one is com-

elled to wonder whether such great care in selecting men is being adequately matched by thought about how in the present and probably continuing scarcity of men and money the available men may best be used. It seems a pity too that when women form so large a proportion of an average parish congregation, there are no women among the lay selectors.

It would be too much to expect that a method so new as this, and so searching that the Church of England has so far said "No" to nearly half the men who have offered for the ordained ministry since the new method came into use, should not be criticized. The fear of too much centralization is not unnatural at the present time, and this has expressed itself in the contention that the bishops have given too much away of their ancient prerogative in choosing ordinands, and that in so doing they have weakened the doctrine of the Church. But it would seem that the new method does rest on the teaching of the Prayer Book, and goes some way towards translating it more fully into practice. These centres are much more than a new piece of machinery. They are giving, not only to candidates but to selectors also, a new experience of the inner life of the Church of England as a fellowship in the life of the Spirit.

So far as we are aware, no comparative study of the methods used to select the ministries of the different Churches has been published or even made. There might be considerable interest and value in a careful piece of work on this important matter.

RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

The supplement in this issue is one of the letters which have reached us about the News-Letter last December on the subject of Russia (C.N.L. No. 275). The writer is a tutor in philosophy at Balliol College, Oxford. He lived for a number of years in the East End of London.

Of the readers who have commented on C.N.L. No. 275, some express warm approval of the line that was taken, while others enter strong protests on the opposite grounds that it was either too sympathetic or too critical towards Russia. In one or two instances the heat reached the point of cancelling a subscription.

One of the main points in the News-Letter was that to achieve a Christian attitude to Russia requires a hard and sustained effort, since it involves holding in continuous tension two contrary states of mind which psychologically are difficult, if not impossible, to combine. We have to respond with the whole of ourselves, in the one case positively, in the other negatively, both to the truth and to the falsehood in the complexity of factors which make up the reality which we call Russia. That is what we intend to try to do in the Christian News-Letter. At different stages it is bound to appear to some readers that we are inclining too much to the one side or the other.

To one of our correspondents the issue appears relatively simple. The decisive factor for him is the fact of communist atheism. That in substance is also the position of the Roman Catholic Church. For it the crucial issue is that of belief or unbelief; all other matters, including questions of social justice, are secondary to this.

In a final sense that, no doubt, is true. No greater or more ultimate question confronts men than whether there is a truth superior to man. Among the many menacing facts in the present situation there is none graver than that the existence of such a truth is widely and categorically denied, and that growing multitudes have not only ceased to believe it, but have, apparently, lost the power to believe it. But in dealing with these vital issues we have constantly to remember how immense is the difference between the reality of

God and the human idea of him. When a man proclaims himself an atheist we have always to ask what God he is rejecting. When the importance of this question is understood, it is seen that atheism may be a stage on the way to faith. Unless we perceive in modern atheism a searching challenge to us to re-examine our whole understanding of God, we have not apprehended the real nature of the modern problem.

We said in C.N.L. No. 275 that its purpose was to provide a framework for the further thinking and discussion that are obviously needed. Mr. Crombie's letter is a welcome contribution to the debate. His points are made clearly and forcibly. It is most certainly a pertinent question whether the existing regimes in the Balkans, for example, may not, in spite of all the abuses of which they are guilty, be accomplishing a historically necessary task, and whether there is, in fact, any alternative government that would not, if it succeeded to power, be equally ruthless in its exercise.

Even those who disagree with Mr. Crombie's judgments must recognize that he is expressing a point of view of which full account has to be taken in estimating the international situation. Whatever may be the truth about Russia, among large sections of the working classes in many countries it is believed that the Russian revolution marks a new stage in human progress, in which the dreams of the toilers have been realized and an end has been put, in principle at least, to the exploitation of man by man. Whether this belief is well-founded or not, its existence is a political fact of real importance.

The differences between Mr. Crombie and those who differ from him on the subject of Russia will probably prove to be largely differences in regard to the facts. The question

which his critics are likely to ask is to what extent social justice is in fact being achieved in Russia, and at what cost.

The difficulty about forming any judgment regarding Russia is that we have so little knowledge about the immense complexity of factors which make up the reality that the word denotes. The fact which is beyond dispute is the emergence in our time of the Russian people from centuries of stagnation and backwardness into the front rank of world powers. The process has awakened boundless enthusiasm and produced astonishing results within an amazingly short time. It has concrete social achievements to its credit from which the West has much to learn. But it is still an unanswered question how much this Russian awakening is due to the philosophy of communism and how much to those mysterious forces in history which at different times cause the slumbering energies of different peoples to spring to life and put them for a while in the van of progress. A paper has reached us from an authority on Russian affairs in which the conclusion is reached that, so far from Russia having succumbed to communism, it would be truer to say that it is the spirit and soul of Russia that have triumphed, and that they have used the bolshevik revolution as a means of overcoming the economic and cultural backwardness of the country, which has pre-occupied the minds of Russian reformers and revolutionaries for more than a century.

A revolution so swift and sweeping could not have been carried out, as all history reminds us, without much violence and suffering. As one of our correspondents (who was one of the earliest subscribers of the Christian News-Letter and who has had wide experience in public life) writes in commenting on C.N.L. No. 275, "could the old and admittedly corrupt regime in Russia have been pulled down without the work of ruthless men? If not, must not Christians accept

the fact that a great deal of the work in the world, which eventually serves their purposes, is done by people who are opposed to their beliefs?"

Mr. Crombie seems to suggest that there are times when the claims of economic justice may have to be given priority over the cultural values of freedom and toleration. It may be true that there are occasions in history when a larger justice can be achieved only by revolution, and that revolution, in order to maintain itself, may have for a period ruthlessly to suppress its opponents. But this does not diminish the importance of the truth which Mr. Middleton Murry expounded in his recent Supplement about the significance of the free society. It is only in the free society that the demands of social justice can ever find stable and balanced satisfaction. The questions with which believers in the free society are concerned are not the minor liberties of a class, but the vital question whether the victims of injustice can obtain redress except in a society in which they are free to voice their grievances, in which they are protected by courts that have power to control the activities of a secret police, and in which the possibility remains open of getting rid of tyrannical rulers. Our immediate concern in this country is neither to judge nor to emulate Tito, but to keep alive among ourselves the vision of a free, constructive and humane way of life as an alternative to the totalitarian state.

Kathleen Bliss

P.S. This letter had already been set up in print when the Government order in connection with the fuel crisis, prohibiting the publication of all periodicals for a fortnight, compelled its suspension.

THE WHOLEHEARTED PURSUIT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

DEAR EDITOR,

On reading News-Letter No. 275 I could not help wishing that Christians wrote less about the value of individual liberty and the threats to its continued existence. I say this, I hope, as a sincere believer in democracy, and not because I have any doubt of the importance of freedom, or of the danger in which it is, as much now as at any other time. Rather, because one does not always serve a cause best by dwelling upon *its* importance ; sometimes it is better tactics to concentrate on some subsidiary cause which must be achieved in order that the main cause may be *possible*.

I shall try to substantiate this thesis by the following argument.

(a) The preaching of individual liberty at the moment is bound to be misunderstood by most people in this country.

(b) The difference between a democratic and a totalitarian system is either a clear-cut distinction in the realm of theory, or a very rough horizontal comparison in the realm of historical facts. In the first case too much concentration upon the distinction directs attention too much upon "what-should-be-if-only" . . . and too little upon "what is". In the second case, too much concentration on the horizontal comparison between two social organizations diverts attention too much from the vertical development of one stage out of another in any one society.

(c) Both history and Christian understanding suggest that development in human affairs consists in getting one thing right at the expense of something else. We are not getting steadily better ; we correct one maladjustment and thereby create another. We end baronial squabbles and have world wars ; we end the injustice of slavery and start having "labour relations". Therefore the question "What is possible now ?" is always as important as the question "How could human affairs be arranged if only men could behave reasonably ?"

THE DANGER OF A WRONG LINE-UP

When a doctrine is enthusiastically received it is usually because it is interpreted in such a way that it suits the interests of some section of society. This preaching of individual liberty is popular and we congratulate ourselves on our innate British spirit of democracy. We *are* naturally democratic, but this truth has a twin-brother, the fact that the professional classes are discovering that if the workers are to have a fair share of our milk production, the milk man must be forbidden to sell cream. Some of our newspaper commentators seem to hold that we are not free if we have to fill up forms—in other words if commodities are controlled in a time of scarcity. Now this is not individual liberty as understood by those Christians who dwell upon it ; it is, however, what it is widely taken to mean. If I am irked by my inability to buy as much food as I like and I hear eminent Christians speaking of the threat to individual liberty, I take them to be endorsing my selfishness.

When we are saying something that will be taken by a class in society as support of its demands, we should ask ourselves whether those demands are legitimate. Now the class which has a legitimate grudge against our social organization is the class which never has had (except during artificial war-time conditions) that freedom of choice, which the professional classes have had and now see diminishing. They are quite clearly aware that they never will approach towards such freedom, without an advance towards a more equitable distribution of wealth. The gravest danger to social health and harmony comes from the belief of the workers that opposition to their legitimate demands is clothed in sanctimonious phrases about freedom. No matter how you protest the sincerity of your belief in liberty, you will not be believed until those who profess moral standards preach the necessity of a more equal distribution of wealth at least as fervently as they preach liberty. You will never convince the bulk of the population of the importance of liberty (I am speaking from five years' experience as a wage-earner), until you convince them, by espousing their claim for equity, that you are not using "liberty" as a catchword for reaction. The gravest danger in our society remains the belief of most of its members that their just claims are being insincerely and sanctimoniously opposed.

For its own sake, the Church *must* dispel the impression that it is "in on" this deception; for society's sake the Church must admit that this deception is used, and denounce it.

THEORETIC PATTERN AND HISTORICAL REALITY

The difference between democracy and communism or totalitarianism in general can be a quite clear-cut philosophical distinction. One is then talking about different relations between human beings—patterns or standards, if you like, which are useful for criticism of any given society. But translating statements about democracy into statements about democrats is very tricky. Our professed beliefs, our conscious standards may be democratic; the same is true of the Americans. But in Greece, Persia, China, we are in danger of supporting reaction (it may be that we have to for valid reasons; the point is merely that in fact we are). It does not follow then from our democratic standards that we are in all our actions democrats. Communism as such may be opposed to liberal principles, but in China the communists may in fact be more liberal than the Kuomintang.

This conflict between principles and practice happens because principles arise in a world which is a going concern, with causal laws of its own, in which some things are possible and others are not. Marxism expresses some truths about human relationships, liberalism expresses others; actual situations are too complex to allow the exact expression of any principles. The conflict between Marxism and liberalism is a conflict between the need for economic equality and the need for political equality in the ideal state. It is not at all the same thing as the conflict between east and west. Marxism will be the ideology of those who feel the one need acutely, liberalism that of those who feel the other. The economic need is felt first. In plain terms poverty is more unpleasant to the poor than being regimented, at least when the regimentation is held to be in the interest of a higher standard of living and more equitable distribution of wealth. In fact in many European countries the communists, however undemocratic, may be the best friends—however unwitting—of democracy, because you will not get people to care about liberty until they feel themselves to have a reasonable share of what is going.

Countries which are broadly-speaking democratic may turn out to produce undemocratic results. Countries which are broadly undemocratic may in certain circumstances lead to an increase of freedom. The only clear-cut distinction is that between the theories.

WHAT IS IMMEDIATELY POSSIBLE ?

One must not neglect the question of vertical development. The Polish elections were not like British ones ; nor are eggs like kittens, but we expect the one of hens and the other of cats. Only some developments are possible in given circumstances. This is not to express a completely determinist view ; many more developments than one are possible, but *some are not*. You cannot get people to care about ideas which mean nothing to them. You cannot ultimately form a stable government out of liberal politicians with no popular backing. You are often forced to choose between Communism and gross reaction. Now reactionaries are often Christians and move, as it was recently expressed, in the same moral universe as ourselves. There are beliefs which communists hold—and practise—which are clearly unchristian. But what is in fact going to happen if you manoeuvre reactionaries into power? Are you not bound to destroy all chances of a stable society? A party which opposes popular demands is increasingly forced to abandon any liberalism it may profess and employ repressive methods. The conflict between perfectly just popular demands and repressive action is bound to lead to an impossible moral situation. The tragedy of all Europe is that the knowledge is spreading that the poor need not be so poor, and that those who profess moral standards show no signs of doing anything about it; they read Koestler and refute Communism, and that is as far as they get. The whole recent history of Europe is surely proof that people do in fact want greater economic justice and security, and that they want these things so strongly, that many of the best of them are prepared to go communist to get them. In this situation you cannot have democracy until something is being done about these demands. Had you a British Labour Party in Eastern Europe the situation would be quite different. No doubt, but you haven't.

Part of the trouble seems to be that we expect too much. Our

own political achievement is so great that we tend to think of social life not as a continual struggle against new problems but as progress along our settled line of advance. We forget the other side of our own political achievement—our materialism, our spiritual complacency, our imperialism, which have made it possible. We can be tolerant because we are comfortable ; we are comfortable because we found in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that we had a good chance of worrying about food and raiment, taking thought for the things of the morrow, and we took that chance. Our comfort, and therefore our tolerance, our democracy, rest in part on such discomforts as slavery for other people. This does not affect the fact that our democracy is a good thing, but it does suggest that nothing in human history is ever simple. How many of Europe's ills may ultimately be due to our example of successful materialism and imperialism in ourselves and our imitators (perhaps the first World War ?) we do not know. But this is the other side of our democracy. One advances on one front at the expense of retreating on others.

Our seventeenth-century forefathers were right in advancing towards toleration ; it was where an advance could be made. It would bring other problems along later, but they could be dealt with as they arose. We are right if we try to advance towards social justice—it will bring its problems, but it is the advance that is open to us now.

No doubt, it would be lightheaded to assume that the U.S.S.R. and its satellites will advance towards tolerance as conditions improve. But the case could be argued that the U.S.A. is trying to make the emergence of settled and tolerant conditions even more unlikely. Certain ideas at certain epochs are more creative than others, not because they are better than others or more important *as ideas*, but because people are determined to see them expressed. In trying to keep the world safe for capitalism the U.S., with our backing, is in fact opposing our more creative ideas. People (at any rate until they experience it) are at the moment prepared to put up with tyranny, because they know and hate the freedom to be poorer than others. “Down with tyranny” is a creative idea when there is religious persecution—there are ordinary people to whom it matters, not only saints

and heroes. It is not a creative idea now. No one will be moved to sincere loyalty by it who is preoccupied by "down with unfair distribution of wealth". If the U.S. were to succeed in Europe it could only be in imposing regimes which go against the people's contemporary sense of justice. Any contemporary sense of justice is partial and will lead to trouble in the future, but health is to be found in satisfying, within limits, each partial demand as it arises. On this argument, then, there is in fact more conflict between our principles and our own actions than between our principles and Russian actions, because the Russians do mean to solve the problems (e.g. nationalism and poverty in Yugoslavia) which must at the moment be solved. We should continually press the Russians to use a more excellent way in going about it, but do let us see what is going on.

The conflict between Christianity and Communism is partly spiritual. We have said nothing of that here. The rest of the conflict with Communism is more a matter of getting in first. If the popular demand for social justice is allowed to go unanswered, or if indeed it is not put at the top of any list of priorities, then the way lies open for a party of proved efficiency and devotion to step in and meet the need. Denunciation of Communism is not a luxury which can be safely indulged in much longer. For those who want to save the world from the spiritual evils of Communism, the only way open is wholehearted committal to the cause of social justice.

Yours sincerely,
IAN CROMBIE.

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